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VOTE!!!

By State Representative John J. Ryan

It's almost Election Day again, the annual event that unfortunately, too many of us take for granted, or worse, regard as something of a nuisance. We are all busy with the details of families and careers and not enough free or 'recreational' time (although I suspect that not many Darienites and Rowaytonites are watching the World Series this week!). But for those of us who are actually crazy enough to devote a great deal of our time and effort to government, this is one of the MOST aggravating portions of the year, because of the phenomena known as '"local election vote dropoff"!

So what does that mean? If you took a look at the participation numbers, meaning the percentage of people who actually vote from year to year, you will discern an amazing trend among voters in our 'neighborhood' of lower Fairfield County, and it is this : there is a remarkably high percentage of participation in Presidential election years, in places like Darien and New Canaan, upwards of 80 % of the registered voters actually get out and vote for their Presidential candidates (and the other people on the ballot in those years) which obviously is a very good thing!

But here is the bad news: in 'local election years', where the candidate at the top of the ticket is a Mayor/1st Selectman (always an odd-number year), voter turnout falls through the floor, often not getting to 50 % !! Does this make ANY sense at all? The obvious conclusion is, that in the frantic live-style of the metro - NYC suburbs, with 'media overload' everywhere, we are "up" on the national governmental issues, but very fuzzy about what is happening in out own communities. This is confirmed by years of polling data on our local towns; a high percentage of people know the Mayor of New York; a surprisingly lower percentage know very much about who presides in their Town Hall!

I recently had conversations with two (very) prominent business leaders who happen to be constituents (even I know they are prominent if they are featured in business magazines!); both were asking about doings in Hartford of interest to them, both conversations touched on a local issue, and both said that they only voted in "important [i.e. national] elections." So I made each of these important constituents unhappy by chastising them with these points:

- While it is wonderful that you pay attention to 'important elections', the issues is your   hometown are NOT important?

- Are you happy or unhappy with how your local government is spending your tax dollars?

- Does your town have any transportation or open space issues

- Are seniors being served as well as they can be?

- Are there no concerns about any educational issues in your community?

And of course, one can, and should, go on and on about issues and topics that are significant and have to be considered. But most amazing to me, however, is that people are often oblivious to the obvious, namely that while it IS very important that you participate in national elections, you are, at best, one of millions of votes cast; in your municipal election, your ability to personally get involved, to see and talk to the candidates, and to effect an outcome, is VASTLY more significant!! Why WOULDN'T you want to devote some time to this?

So this year, please keep in mind that EVERY election is important. You still have enough time to get some information, to ask questions, and to do an absentee ballot if you won't be able to go to the polls on Election Day. You pay your taxes; isn't your town government worthy of a few minutes of your time and attention?

 Please feel free to contact me with your concerns and issues. As your state representative, it is my job, and my priority to represent you and to make sure that your needs and concerns are addressed at the capitol. You can write to me at Room 4200, Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT 06106-1591, send me e-mail at John.Ryan@cga.ct.gov or call my office toll-free at 1-800-842-1423.